

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8483

SECDEF

INFO USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 19677

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: NATO, MILI, AWACS, UK

SUBJECT: UK PRESS REPORTING ON AWACS

SUMMARY. THREE QUALITY PAPERS, THE SUNDAY TIMES OF 5 DECEMBER AND THE FINANCIAL TIMES AND THE GUARDIAN OF 6 DECEMBER, HAVE RUN LENGTHY ARTICLES ON NATO AEW. THE ISSUES ARE FAIRLY TREATED BUT THE FLAVOR OF THE REPORTING IS WELL REFLECTED IN THE HEADLINES: "THE POUNDS 1.4 BILLION QUESTION" (SUNDAY TIMES), "MR. MULLEY'S AIRCRAFT COLLISION COURSE" (FINANCIAL TIMES) AND "PLAN FOR AIR RADAR MAY NOT TAKE OFF" (GUARDIAN).
END SUMMARY.

1. ALL THREE PAPERS TREAT THE ISSUES INVOLVED FAIRLY OBJECTIVELY. THE SUNDAY TIMES ARTICLE BY TONY GERAGHTY CASTS THE STRONGEST DOUBT ON AWACS: "AND APART FROM TEETHING TROUBLES WITH AWACS...EUROPE'S NARROWER AND RADAR-RIDDEN ENVIRONMENT MERITS AN EARLY-WARNING AIRCRAFT TAILORED TO ITS NEEDS. THAT AIRCRAFT DOES NOT EXIST... JUST OVER A YEAR AGO THE US GOVERNMENT'S WATCHDOG BODY, THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE, PRODUCED A WITHERING REPORT ON THE WAY AWACS WAS BEING TESTED BY
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THE US AIR FORCE. IT ALLEGED: ...AWACS WAS NOT TESTED

IN A REALISTIC SCENARIO THAT WOULD APPROXIMATE TO THE
WARTIME CONDITIONS IN EUROPE."

2. THE FINANCIAL TIMES ARTICLE BY MICHAEL DONNE AND
MALCOLM RUTHERFORD SAYS THAT AWACS "...RAISES IN THE
MOST ACUTE FORM SO FAR THE QUESTION OF HOW FAR EUROPE
CAN GO IN BUYING US TECHNOLOGY, IF THE PRICE IS A LOSS
OF JOBS FOR ITS OWN DEFENSE INDUSTRIES... THE COST/JOBS
PROBLEM IS PARTICULARLY RELEVANT TO BRITAIN, WHICH IS
THE ONLY COUNTRY TO HAVE BEEN DEVELOPING ANYTHING LIKE
AN ALTERNATIVE PROJECT. MR. FRED MULLEY, THE DEFENSE
SECRETARY, WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY PREFER A NATO SOLUTION
AND ACCEPT THE BOEING E-3A... A FORMIDABLE PARLIAMENTARY
LOBBY IS GROUPING AGAINST ANY SUCH ACTION." CONTINUING
THE ARTICLE NOTES THAT THE "...UNDOUBTED ATTRACTIONS
OF STANDARDIZATION OFFERED BY THE E-3A, LED TO A COM-
PETITIVE EVALUATION OF THAT AIRCRAFT AGAINST NIMROD.
WHILE MANY IN THE UK AEROSPACE INDUSTRY WOULD ARGUE THAT
THE EVALUATION WAS AT BEST CURSORY, AND AT WORST
VIRTUALLY NONEXISTENT, THE E-3A WON... THE MAIN PRO-
TAGONISTS OF AEW IN NATO ARE THE US, UK AND NORWAY.
CANADA WOULD ALSO PROBABLY GO ALONG. SOME INTEREST HAS
BEEN SHOWN BY THE FRENCH... THE DUTCH, THE BELGIANS
AND THE DANES ARE LUKEWARM... THIS PLACES THE ONUS ON
WEST GERMANY... IF THE GERMANS WERE TO SAY NO TO AWACS,
IT WOULD WITHOUT DOUBT BE A DEAD DUCK... THERE WOULD BE
ALMOST NO CHANCE AT ALL, HOWEVER, OF CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT
ACCEPTING AWACS AS A BASICALLY US-GERMAN PROJECT. TO
HERR SCHMIDT THE EXPENDITURE COULD ONLY BE JUSTIFIED IF
IT WERE BACKED BY THE ALLIANCE AS A WHOLE, OR AT LEAST BY
A LARGE PART OF IT."

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3. CONTINUING, THE ARTICLE NOW FOCUSES ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS FOR BRITAIN: "THIS, IN TURN, PUTS THE ONUS BACK ON BRITAIN. IF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT WERE TO COME DOWN IN FAVOR OF NIMROD RATHER THAN BOEING, IT WOULD PROBABLY DESTROY ANY POSSIBILITY OF A NATO SOLUTION. IT WOULD BE TAKEN, AT LEAST BY THE GERMANS, AS A VOTE AGAINST ALLIANCE SOLIDARITY AND, IN PRACTICE, THAT IS WHAT IT WOULD BE. FOR IF MR. MULLEY WERE AGAIN TO PRESS THE CLAIMS OF NIMROD AT THIS WEEK'S MEETINGS, HE WOULD TAKE NO MEMBER OF THE ALLIANCE WITH HIM. EVEN IF HE WERE TO CALL FOR THE DECISION TO BE YET AGAIN DEFERRED, HE WOULD BE RISKING A FURTHER SUBSTANTIAL DELAY IN GETTING ANY KIND OF AIRBORNE EARLY WARNING SYSTEM UNDER WAY. YET IF HE WERE ABLE TO OPT FOR AWACS, HE WOULD PROBABLY BE ABLE TO BRING IN NOT ONLY THE GERMANS, BUT ALSO THE SMALL COUNTRY WAVERERS. THERE COULD THEN BE BOTH BETTER EUROPEAN DEFENSE AND GREATER COHESION OF THE ALLIANCE." THE ARTICLE ENDS BY ASSERTING THAT "THE DOMESTIC PRESURES AGAINST SUCH A COURSE REMAIN CONSIDERABLE, BOTH FROM PARLIAMENT AND THE UK AEROSPACE INDUSTRY, AND IT UNCLASSIFIED

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CANNOT BE DENIED THE COST OF AWACS IS HIGH... IT IS THE SORT OF QUESTION BRITAIN HAS FACED BEFORE...WHETHER TO PUT THE MAINTENANCE OF A BRITISH PROJECT FIRST OR THE WIDER INTERESTS OF THE ALLIANCE. ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, AWACS COULD PROVIDE A DECISIVE ANSWER."

4. THE GUARDIAN ARTICLE BY DAVID FAIRHALL RAISES MANY OF THE POINTS NOTED IN THE TWO OTHER PAPERS. IT CONCLUDES BY SAYING "THE FEELING IN WHITEHALL IS THAT A SUCCESSFUL AWACS WOULD BE AN IMPORTANT BOOST FOR THE ALLIANCE IN TERMS OF STANDARDIZATION AND SOLIDARITY, BUT THAT BRITISH HEARTS WILL NOT BE BROKEN IF WE HAVE TO FALL BACK ON A NATIONAL PROJECT... IF THE DEFENSE PLANNING COMMITTEE AGREES TO DEFER ITS DECISION...IT WILL LEAVE THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE IN AN AWKWARD SPOT."

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